

Botwinick, Jack 2001

Dr. Jack Botwinick Oral History 2001

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Jack Botwinick

National Institute of Mental Health (1955-1962)

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Interview with Dr. Jack Botwinick (former member of the Aging Section of the former Laboratory of Psychology (Laboratory of Brain and Cognition) of the NIMH Intramural Research Program) conducted via email.

Interviewer: Dr. Ingrid Farreras, NIH History Office

Background information about Dr. Botwinick's personal and professional life prior to and following his years at NIMH please see Jack Botwinick's "A forty-year career in geropsychology," in James E. Birren and Johannes Schroots (Eds.), *A History of Geropsychology in Autobiography*, (pp. 55-67). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2000.

Farreras: When the Lab was established it consisted of six sections: Aging, Developmental

Psychology, Animal Behavior, Perception and Learning, Personality and its Deviations, and the Chief's Section. Do you remember who was working in those sections when you arrived?

Botwinick: In Aging there were James Birren and Eugene Streicher, who I think referred to himself as a neurochemist. Somewhere along the way he joined the extramural side. Joel Garbus was an M.A. chemist; Joseph Brinley was a Ph.D. research assistant. In Animal Behavior there were Mortimer Mishkin and Allan Mirsky and their chief Hal Rosvold (Haldor Enger Rosvold). In Child Development there was Nancy Bayley, Earl Schaefer, and Dick Bell. In Perception and Learning there was Donald Blough and Virgil Carlson. I'm not sure of who was in Personality or in the Section of the Chief but the people I remember are David Shakow, David Rosenthal, Theodore Zahn (who came a bit later than I), Donald Boomer, Morris Parloff, and Allen Dittmann. My closest social relationships were with Gene Streicher early on, and later, for most of my NIMH tenure, Dave Rosenthal and Ted Zahn.

Farreras: Did Shakow hire members for each Section or did each Section Chief hire its own

investigators? What criteria were used to hire investigators? How did they decide whom to hire?

Botwinick: As far as I could tell, Shakow hired most of the first people, probably with input

from Robert Cohen and maybe Seymour Kety. Once the chiefs were set, they did the basic recruitment. This certainly was true for Aging and Animal Behavior. An underlying concept of the development of the laboratories was to recruit young, bright, able people and let them do their thing and not be concerned with money or extra-laboratory issues. It is questionable in my mind whether this concept worked because too many of us were not ready for this responsibility. The sections of the Laboratory of Psychology were organized differently perhaps more by circumstance than by intent. For example, Aging and Animal Behavior had strong chiefs and these chiefs had appreciable control but not absolute control over their staffs. Contrarily, Perception and Learning had but one investigator after Donald Blough left and he Virgil Carlson was chief and bottle washer both. This led to the continual discussion of who is "an independent investigator" and I don't think it was ever answered. Nevertheless, things seem to have gone well enough and I don't know of anyone who was really dissatisfied.

Farreras: By what criteria, and by whom, were research areas selected for emphasis? Did

particular personnel interests shape the research interests in the various sections? How did these programs grow and what led some to be aborted or redirected?

Botwinick: From my perspective, personnel interests alone shaped research projects. I think

that growth of sections was based on productivity and strong chiefs asserting influence.

Farreras: What was the relationship between the lab and the three other intramural labs

established before it such as Neurophysiology (Wade Marshall), Neurochemistry (Seymour Kety) and Socio-Environmental Studies (John Clausen)? Were there any tensions, were they complementary? Was there any research collaboration with these labs?

Botwinick: For the most part, associations, both social and scientific, were made individually,

most often by chance. There were exceptions to this; for example, the multidisciplinary aging study that Jim Birren headed and arranged (See J. E. Birren et al (Eds.) *Human Aging: A Biological and Behavioral Study*. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963). I don't remember any tensions and I believe relationships were based individually on how they meshed.

Farreras: Do you know what the distribution of funding between NIMH's Extramural and

Intramural Programs?

Botwinick: All I can say is that, early on at least, much, very much more money went to the extramural programs than intramural.